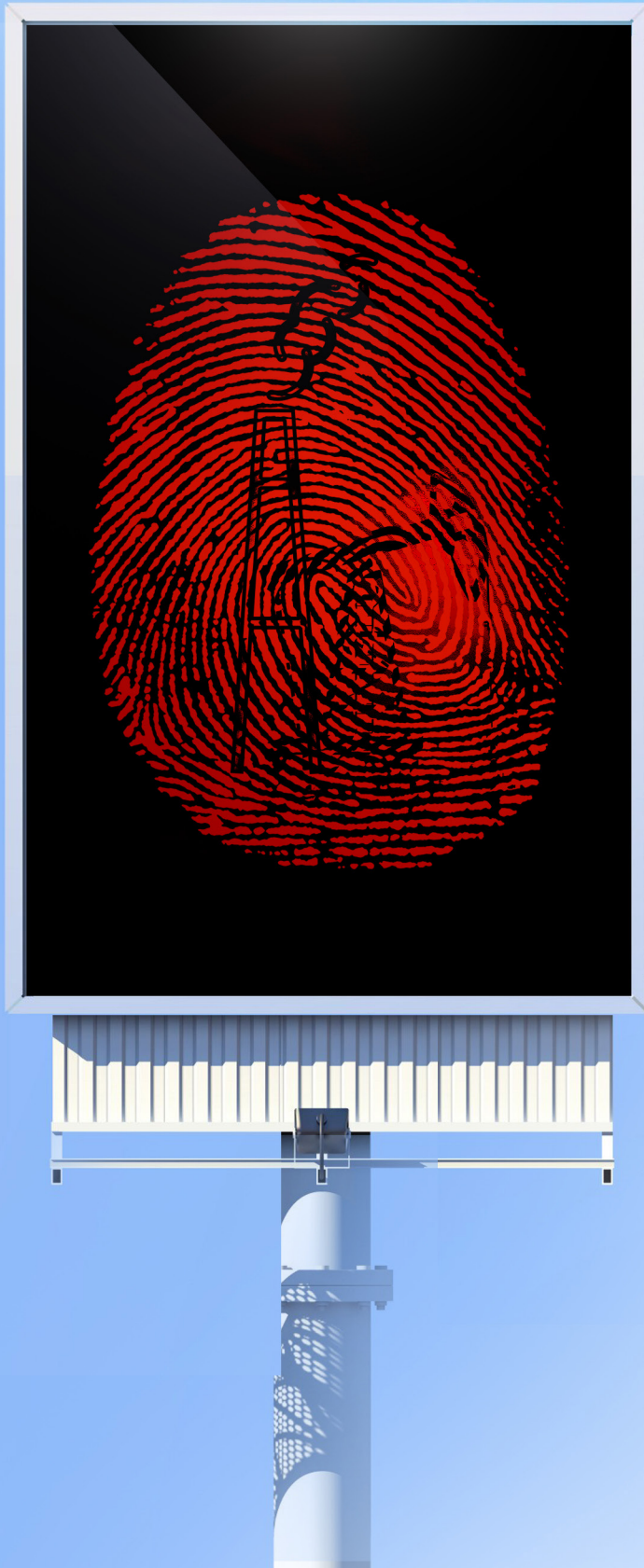


# BREAK THE FOSSIL INFLUENCE

**Guidance for**  
Health Organizations to  
Screen PR & Media Agencies

**May 2025**

GLOBAL  
CLIMATE & HEALTH  
ALLIANCE





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## CHALLENGING the Fossil Fuel Industry's Harmful Media Campaigns, to protect Global Health and the Climate

Fossil fuels present a grave threat to human health, driving climate change and thus causing widespread harm, including the spread of diseases, extreme heat, water insecurity, malnutrition, and mental health impacts.<sup>1</sup> Their extraction and use also result in millions of deaths annually due to air, water, and soil pollution, disproportionately affecting workers and frontline communities. Fossil fuel companies have not only perpetrated environmental harm but also injustices and human rights violations, particularly against Indigenous and marginalized communities.<sup>2</sup>



**major  
fossil fuel companies  
funded disinformation  
campaigns designed  
to mislead the public  
and policymakers**



Significant evidence now shows that major fossil fuel companies have known for decades about climate change.<sup>3</sup> Yet, rather than use this information to make early, meaningful investments to lead a clean energy transition, instead they funded disinformation campaigns designed to mislead the public and policymakers, creating doubt and stalling urgent action.<sup>4</sup> This not only increased risks for local communities but also perpetuated a dangerous status quo. Despite these harms, the fossil fuel industry's social license remains intact, much like the tobacco industry before it, prior to



the coordinated effort of the public health community to challenge the access and social license of tobacco. Fossil fuel industry influence infiltrates every aspect of life, governance, and policy, obstructing the development of just, sustainable health systems and distorting public perception and decision-making processes at all levels.

<sup>1</sup> <https://climateandhealthalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Cradle-To-Grave-Fossil-Fuels-Brief.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/features/fossil-fuel-extraction-harming-indigenous-communities/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.desmog.com/2024/01/30/fossil-fuel-industry-sponsored-climate-science-1954-keeling-api-wspa/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/aug/08/fossil-fuel-industry-using-disinformation-campaign-to-slow-green-transition-says-un>

Fossil fuels are a health-harming product, and the marketing and public relations campaigns used to promote them are intentionally designed to obscure the damage they cause.<sup>5</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified “targeted lobbying and doubt-inducing media strategies” as a major obstacle in addressing the climate emergency.<sup>6</sup> These strategies closely follow the tobacco industry’s playbook<sup>7</sup> and are often executed by the same consulting, marketing, public relations, and lobbying agencies.<sup>8</sup> Tactics such as casting doubt on scientific consensus, promoting false ‘safer’ alternatives, creating fake front groups, and emphasizing consumer ‘choice’ are used by both the fossil fuel industry and have been used by the tobacco industry to manipulate public opinion and policy, further obstructing meaningful climate action and the transition to health-centered, equitable societies.



Within the advertising and public relations (PR) industry, there is a growing movement to oppose working on these health harming campaigns. That movement is bolstered by jurisdictions that have banned fossil fuel advertising, or subjected it to increased legal scrutiny. Notably, this year, these initiatives received a significant boost with the UN Secretary-General’s call for fossil-free advertising.<sup>9</sup> Within advertising and PR, the initiative **Clean Creatives** has organized over 1200 agencies in 65 countries to sign a pledge not to work with fossil fuel companies, including some of the advertising and PR industry’s most innovative creative firms.<sup>10</sup> In addition, consumer protection authorities in the UK, South Africa, Canada, Singapore, and other countries have increased scrutiny of polluter ads and begun restricting the kinds of claims that can be made about fossil fuels. Multiple local jurisdictions in the UK, Europe, Canada and Australia have taken steps to ban fossil fuel ads entirely.

movements against health harming campaigns received a significant boost with the UN Secretary-General’s call for fossil-free advertising

5 <https://cape.ca/focus/fossil-fuel-ad-ban/>

6 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/chapter/chapter-5/>

7 <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/13/business/exxon-climate-change-harvard/index.html>

8 <https://ricochet.media/media/media-3/the-propaganda-playbook-how-the-pr-industry-shifted-from-tobacco-to-fossil-fuels/>

9 <https://www.desmog.com/2024/06/05/un-chief-calls-for-ban-on-fossil-fuel-advertising/>

10 <https://cleancreatives.org/>



## Why should Health Organizations **LEAD THE CHARGE** against Fossil Fuel Influence?

Health leadership and organizations are among the most trusted and credible voices and play a pivotal role in the fight against fossil fuels. The health argument is one of the most compelling and urgent drivers for change. Fossil fuel pollution is directly responsible for millions of deaths annually through exposure to toxic chemicals, air pollution, and the impacts of climate change, and exacerbates health crises like respiratory diseases, heart conditions, and climate-induced threats such as heatwaves and malnutrition. By taking a strong stand, health leaders can harness the power of the health argument to expose the true costs of fossil fuel dependence, shifting the conversation about fossil fuels from a narrow focus on economics and energy to one that centers, holistically, human survival and well-being.

The healthcare advertising market, valued at USD 42.28 billion in 2024 and projected to grow to USD 64.21 billion by 2032, highlights the immense influence health organizations wield in shaping public narratives.<sup>11</sup> With a robust Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 5.4%, this growth underscores the expanding reach of health messaging in the PR and advertising space. Health organizations are uniquely positioned to leverage this platform, not only to promote health products and services but also to drive critical conversations on public health issues, including climate change, environmental justice, and preventive health. Health organizations can play a major role in revoking the fossil fuel industry's social license by screening PR and media agencies for fossil fuel connections and committing to no longer work with agencies with ties to the fossil fuel industry. This will safeguard the credibility of health institutions and amplify their role as protectors of public health, prioritizing people and the planet over polluters.

## Global Healthcare Advertising Market

# 5.4%

**Global Market CAGR  
2024-32**



<sup>11</sup> <https://www.marketdataforecast.com/market-reports/healthcare-advertising-market>

## Take the **COMMITMENT** for Fossil-Free Health Communications

Organizations are encouraged to take the commitment for Fossil Free Health Communications, making a bold stand against the influence of the fossil fuel industry in the PR and advertising space. By committing to cut ties with PR and media agencies connected to this harmful sector, they can play a vital role in championing a healthier, more sustainable future.

### **The Commitment for Fossil-Free Health Communications**

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As organizations dedicated to protecting and promoting public health, we recognize the profound and growing threats that fossil fuels pose to human health and the environment. The fossil fuel industry's contribution to climate change, air, water and soil pollution, and related public health crises makes it incompatible with our mission to safeguard the well-being of current and future generations.

In order to align our communications practices with our commitment to public health and climate action, we intend not to employ PR and advertising agencies that represent fossil fuel companies. As an intermediate step toward aligning our communications practices with our commitment to public health and climate action, we will initiate a review of the PR and advertising agencies we work with, assessing their policies and client portfolios for alignment with our values. During this period, we will prioritize collaboration with agencies that demonstrate transparency, commitment to truthful communication, and shared goals for a healthier, more sustainable world. Our ultimate aim is to work exclusively with agencies that do not represent fossil fuel companies.

## The Commitment

*We,*  
the undersigned medical and public health organizations,  
commit the following:

- 1. Commitment to Fossil-Free PR and Advertising Agencies**  
We intend to work exclusively with PR and advertising agencies that do not have ongoing relationships with fossil fuel companies or related industries, including those connected to oil, gas, coal, and associated lobbying organizations
- 2. Rejection of Greenwashing and Disinformation**  
We aim to avoid collaborating with agencies that have engaged in or promoted campaigns that mislead the public about the environmental and health impacts of fossil fuels. We seek to work with agencies that prioritize transparent, evidence-based communication on climate change and public health issues.
- 3. Transparency and Accountability**  
We will require any PR or advertising agency we employ to disclose their client portfolios and confirm their commitment to not representing fossil fuel interests. We will prioritize agencies that have made public statements or taken actions to distance themselves from the fossil fuel industry.
- 4. Alignment with Public Health and Climate Values**  
We will employ PR and advertising agencies that align with our public health mission and that are committed to promoting climate action and health equity in their campaigns. We will seek out suppliers who actively support the transition to a clean energy future and promote sustainable solutions to protect human health.
- 5. Advocating for Ethical Communications**  
We will use our platforms and influence to encourage other health organizations, agencies, and sectors to adopt similar fossil-free commitments. We will advocate for ethical communications practices that prioritize the health of people and the planet.

## Our Call to Action

Signed  
Organization  
Name

*We* encourage all medical, public health, and allied organizations to join us in this commitment to reject fossil fuel influence in communications and to align with agencies that support a just, healthy, and sustainable future. By making this commitment, we take an essential step in dismantling the disinformation campaigns that fuel climate inaction and health harm, and we stand up for the integrity of public health communication.

# 3

## SCREENING STEPS

### for Health Organisations to Implement the Commitment

Outlined below is a simple, step-by-step process for health organizations to screen PR and ad agencies for any associations with the fossil fuel industry before hiring them. The goal is to ensure that all partners align with the organization's health and climate values, avoiding hiring companies with conflicts of interest that could undermine public health goals.

#### Step 1

**Ask for Full Client Disclosure**

#### Step 2

**Request a Fossil-Free Commitment**

#### Step 3

**Look for Public Accountability**



# Ask for Full Client Disclosure

Before engaging any PR or advertising agency, communicate your commitment to fossil-free advertising and request full client disclosure, focusing particularly on clients from the past 3 years. This should include direct clients from the fossil fuel industry, such as oil, gas, and coal companies, as well as related industries like fossil fuel lobbying groups, trade associations, or organizations that promote fossil fuels. Integral to this step is reviewing the agency's past campaigns, especially those related to environmental, climate, or energy topics, to evaluate how their work aligns with public health and climate action goals. It is important to identify any campaigns that may have downplayed climate science, promoted fossil fuels, or engaged in greenwashing—misrepresenting fossil fuel companies as sustainable or environmentally friendly.

For larger PR agencies, it is also advisable to review their sustainability and social responsibility policies. Request documentation of their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, including any initiatives aimed at reducing their carbon footprint or promoting social responsibility.

Key questions to ask include whether the agency has worked with any fossil fuel companies in the past three years, if they currently have ongoing contracts with such companies or related organizations, and whether they have previously promoted campaigns for fossil fuel companies that involved minimizing the health or environmental impacts of fossil fuels.

Additionally, it can be helpful to inquire about the agency's own sustainability practices. Do they use renewable energy or work to reduce waste? Do they engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that align with health and climate goals? These insights will help ensure supplier alignment with public health and environmental values before making a hiring decision.

**Note:** Agencies should be open and transparent about their client portfolios. Lack of transparency is a red flag.



# Request a Fossil-Free Commitment

Ask the agency to commit to not working with fossil fuel companies in the future, as a step to ensure that their work aligns with the values of your health organization. Inquire whether they are willing to sign a fossil-free pledge, such as the **Clean Creatives pledge**, which involves a commitment to refuse any future contracts with fossil fuel companies. Additionally, ask if they have a public policy or internal guidelines in place that prioritize ethical clients over those associated with fossil fuels. These actions demonstrate a genuine commitment to supporting a healthier, more sustainable future.

# 2

# Look for Public Accountability

The agency should demonstrate transparency regarding its stance on climate change and its relationship with the fossil fuel industry. Review any public statements, reports, or commitments the agency has made concerning its clients and ethical practices. This includes examining whether the agency has publicly committed to supporting climate action and public health, and whether it has been transparent about its work with fossil fuel clients in the past. Additionally, assess whether the agency has a public policy or internal guidelines that prioritize working with ethical clients over those associated with fossil fuel interests.

# 3

## LIST OF QUESTIONS to ask the agency

- › Have you ever worked on campaigns that promoted fossil fuel companies or related industries?

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- › Can you disclose the percentage of your agency's revenue from the fossil fuel sector in the previous year, and provide a client disclosure report indicating your revenue sources by sector?

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- › Are you willing to commit to not working with fossil fuel companies in the future?

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- › Can you provide examples of past campaigns that promoted public health, climate action, or environmental justice?

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- › Do you have internal policies that determine how you communicate about sustainability, and how do you implement them in your business operations?

## FINAL DECISION

Based on the answers to these questions and the review of their client history, campaigns, and internal policies, make an informed decision on whether the agency aligns with your health organization's values and mission.



The agency has no recent fossil fuel clients, demonstrates transparency, and is **committed** to supporting climate and public health goals going forward.



The agency has recent fossil fuel clients, but demonstrates transparency and **willingness to commit** to phasing out any new fossil fuel clients within a set, near term timeline.



The agency has worked with fossil fuel companies, lacks transparency, or is **unwilling to commit** to a fossil-free future.

## CASE STUDY



### CVS Health and Tobacco

#### A Bold Stand for Health Leadership



**CVSquitsforgood**

In 2014, CVS Health, a leading American healthcare company that owns CVS Pharmacy - a retail pharmacy chain, took an unprecedented step in corporate responsibility by discontinuing the sale of tobacco products across all 7,600 of its U.S. retail stores.<sup>12</sup> This decision, costing an estimated \$2 billion in annual revenue,<sup>13</sup> was motivated by a commitment to align CVS's business practices with its core mission: to promote health and well-being. CVS's leadership recognized that selling tobacco—a product incompatible with health goals—contradicted its vision of becoming a health-focused enterprise. This bold move underscored the powerful role health organizations can play in revoking the social license of industries that endanger public health.

#### Impact and Public Health Influence

CVS's decision was more than a business change; it catalyzed a broader conversation about the responsibilities of health-focused organizations. The impact reverberated across sectors, encouraging hospitals, universities, and other retailers to re-evaluate their own relationships with the tobacco industry. Research following CVS's announcement revealed a measurable drop in

cigarette sales in areas where CVS had a strong market presence, demonstrating the ripple effect of leadership on public health.<sup>14</sup> To deepen its commitment, CVS launched anti-smoking initiatives, including educational campaigns and smoking cessation programs. Beyond social responsibility, these programs contributed directly to reducing tobacco-related harm and improving community health. Additionally, CVS joined the *Quit Big Tobacco* campaign,<sup>15</sup> a movement urging companies to cut ties with PR and advertising agencies that work with the tobacco industry. This extended CVS's stance from simply removing products to challenging the broader mechanisms that perpetuate harmful industries, reinforcing that health leadership includes scrutinizing corporate relationships and partnerships.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/cvs-caremark-tobacco-cigarette-sales-103145>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/cvs-caremark-to-stop-selling-tobacco-at-all-cvspanpharmacy-locations-243662651.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5343689/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.exchange4media.com/marketing-news/cvs-health-pledges-not-to-work-with-agencies-that-promote-smoking-or-vaping-96509.html>

## Parallels with the Fossil Fuel Industry and Health Leadership Today

Today, the fossil fuel industry employs similar PR and advertising tactics as tobacco, using disinformation to downplay environmental and health impacts and obstruct action on climate change. As CVS did with tobacco, health organizations now face the opportunity to challenge fossil fuel influence by cutting ties with media and PR firms that promote fossil fuels. This would mirror CVS's approach, signaling to the public that health organizations are committed to revoking the social license of fossil fuels and prioritizing people over polluters.



By joining the fossil-free media movement, health organizations strengthen their credibility and ensure alignment with their mission, shielding public health advocacy from the influence of harmful industries. Much like the tobacco industry before it, the fossil fuel sector's social license hinges on the acceptance of its advertising and PR messages. Health organizations can play a pivotal role in dismantling this influence and reorienting public discourse toward human well-being and climate health.

### More Resources

The F-List - Documentation of known relationships between fossil fuel companies and advertising and PR agencies globally, as well as analysis of major companies in the sector: <https://cleancreatives.org/f-list>

Clean Creatives Pledge - a public commitment to not hire agencies that have fossil fuel clients: <https://cleancreatives.org/join>

List of agencies and individuals who have signed the Clean Creatives pledge (potential resource pool to engage with): <https://cleancreatives.org/agency-signers>

Institute of Advertising Ethics Greenwashing Shield: <https://www.iaethics.org/greenwashing>

United States Federal Trade Commission Green Guides Overview: <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/environmental-claims-summary-green-guides>

EU Commission on Green Claims: [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/green-claims\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/circular-economy/green-claims_en)

The Comms Declare Members page lists organizations and individuals committed to climate-conscious communications, pledging not to promote fossil fuels or high greenhouse gas pollution. <https://commsdeclare.org/members/>

DeSmog's Advertising & Public Relations Database offers comprehensive research on firms that have managed the reputations of fossil fuel clients and developed greenwashing campaigns to downplay the urgency of climate change. <https://www.desmog.com/advertising-pr-database/>



The **Global Climate and Health Alliance (GCHA)** works at the forefront of a growing global movement of health professionals and health and development organisations dedicated to promoting a healthy, equitable, and sustainable future for all. We address the climate crisis through evidence-based advocacy, policy, movement building, research and strategic communications.

With 200+ organisational members, from every region and reaching over 125 countries, the Alliance co-chairs the WHO-Civil Society Working Group on Climate & Health and collaborates with organisations and agencies around the world to ensure that people's health is protected in the climate change era, in national, regional, and international decision-making. We are committed to tackling the climate crisis to preserve a healthy home for humanity.

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